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FM AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7471  
INFO RUCNIAD/IGAD COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUEHBS/AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS 2964  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 4005  
RUEHC/DEPT OF INTERIOR WASHINGTON DC  
RUEAUSA/DEPT OF AGRICULTURE WASHINGTON DC  
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USAID/W DCHA/AA MHESS, GGOTTLIEB  
AFR/AA KALMQUIST, WWARREN, JBORNS  
DCHA/OFDA KLUU, ACONVERY, PMORRIS, KCHANNELL  
AFR/EA KNELSON, BDUNFORD  
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STATE DEPARTMENT FOR AF/E AND PRM/AFR  
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ROME FOR OHA  
BRUSSELS FOR USEU PBROWN  
GENEVA FOR NKYLOH, RMA  
USUN FOR TMALY  
NSC FOR PMARCHAN, TSHORTLEY

E.O. 12958: N/A

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REF: ADDIS ABABA 3226

SUBJECT: ETHIOPIA DISASTER DECLARATION: IMMINENT  
HUMANITARIAN CRISIS IN SOMALI REGION

1. ACTION REQUEST: Ambassador requests Department's concurrence to announce disaster declaration from Addis Ababa, rather than from Washington. If Department concurs, Post seeks to make this announcement on Friday, August 17. END ACTION REQUEST.

2. SUMMARY. Concerns that a severe humanitarian crisis may be imminent in Ethiopia's Somali Region are growing. The confluence of Government of Ethiopia (GOE) policies in the Region's Ogaden area are contributing elements to the increasingly man-made crisis along with actions in the region by the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF). These three policies are: a) restricting commercial trade to these areas as part of the ongoing security campaign; b) allowing bureaucratic reorganizations to delay delivery of emergency food assistance; and c) the movement of pastoralist populations and their herds into designated settlement areas. ONLF elements have also targeted civilians, harassed and threatened NGOs, and may be placing landmines on roads in the Ogaden.

3. In light of the deteriorating humanitarian conditions, coupled with projected humanitarian needs in food, water, nutrition and health interventions, the U.S. Ambassador hereby declares that a complex emergency exists in the Somali Region of Ethiopia. Accordingly, activities that address urgent humanitarian needs should be eligible for funding under USAID's International Disaster Assistance.

4. This disaster declaration for the Somali Region supplements the general disaster re-declaration for

Ethiopia (reftel) made at the beginning of the fiscal year for ongoing humanitarian assistance in other areas. Updated humanitarian reporting for Ethiopia on emerging humanitarian hotspots and flood-affected areas will be forthcoming (septel) as additional information becomes available. END SUMMARY.

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OVERALL SITUATION - JUST HOW BAD IS IT?  
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15. The conflict-related situation is greatly affecting the humanitarian outlook in the Ogaden. GOE policies in response to increased attacks by the ONLF restrict the movement of people and trade, and humanitarian assistance in the Ogaden areas of the region remain a concern. Despite recent good rains, the convergence of multiple shocks have strained livestock herds and resulted in increased vulnerability to famine and destitution through loss of livelihoods. The cumulative shocks affecting this area includes a decade of drought, conflict, high rates of malnutrition, steadily increasing food prices, floods, and Rift Valley fever. The household economy studies of the area indicate 100 percent of the population depends on commercial markets for the majority of their food. For all groups, and particularly pastoralists, the biggest expenditure items are staple foods. Prior to the current military operations, food prices were already high; informal market surveys now indicate tripling of many of the already high prices since June. The prevention of almost all commercial imports to the area and associated price increases on food and non-food commodities, the suspension of food distributions until recently, and the

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forced/restricted movement of pastoralists, threaten to completely exhaust fragile coping mechanisms in areas of Somali Region. Preliminary assessments from joint GOE-UN-NGO teams of parts of the area (Korahe, Warder, Gode) indicate pre-famine conditions (consumption of livestock, exceedingly high food grain prices, consumption of wild grasses/grains, etc.).

16. Increased prevalence of acute watery diarrhea (AWD, or cholera) and corresponding crisis-level case fatality rates and malnutrition are emerging in locations like Fik and Jijiga. Comprehensive data on specific rates of AWD has been difficult to obtain, due to current GOE sensitivities and limited humanitarian access. However, international agencies are reporting pockets of growing malnutrition in both the Ogaden and non-Ogaden areas, with admission rates doubling in some community therapeutic feeding centers. Of particular concern are areas that are non-accessible due to security operations, as minimal information is available. In this semi-arid region, the capping of water sources presents an immediate, life-threatening humanitarian concern for communities affected. Forced, restricted, or even voluntary mass movement of pastoralists also threatens to deplete grazing lands and increase livestock disease transfer rates. [NOTE: Pasture conditions have been able to sustain livestock in rural areas to date only due to good 2006 short Deyr rains, but if livestock are moved into concentrated areas, this will not last. END NOTE.] Increased population density in urban or settlement areas is also expected to aggravate AWD conditions already present in the region. The likelihood of local flooding, particularly around Gode and Fik, pose an additional concern.

17. Ongoing GOE security operations and access restrictions continue to limit detailed reporting and verification of overall conditions. Humanitarian access is limited, and recent landmine fatalities underscore the challenges operational humanitarian agencies are facing. At the same time, anecdotal reports are increasing by an array of humanitarian actors of human rights violations

purportedly by both parties to the conflict--the Ethiopian military and the ONLF--in these areas, including extra-judicial killings, rape, burning of villages, and forced relocation of pastoralists and other populations. There have also been recent reports that certain access to basic services are being denied in some villages, such as the capping of water sources and refusing delivery of medical supplies. Underlying concerns sparked by the increasing volume of anecdotal reports that the military campaigns are starving populations and forcing relocation of populations into designated areas have rendered the GOE increasingly vulnerable to media, donor, UN, and international NGO concerns over human rights violations.

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HUMANITARIAN FOOD ASSISTANCE  
- ONLY A DROP IN THE BUCKET  
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¶8. In the Somali Region, 100 percent of the population relies on commercial food for survival. Almost no commercial food aid is getting into the five Ogadeni zones (Fik, Degehabur, Gode, Korahe and Warder) of the Somali

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Region where GOE military operations are underway. The miniscule trickles of commercial goods that may be getting through to a few urban areas are restricted to the urban areas only. The GOE has advised the United Nations and other humanitarian actors that the commercial restrictions must be enforced to limit contraband, particularly supplies and weapons going to the ONLF. The general consensus among aid agencies is that if the commercial restrictions are not lifted immediately, the humanitarian situation will eventually deteriorate to pre-famine or famine-like conditions and affect all communities equally. Emergency food assistance will not be able to fill this gap, even if access is permitted. The current coping mechanism for pastoralists in these areas is to live off the meat and milk of their animals, but herd size could be rapidly depleted in rural areas should this continue, as it is considered the coping mechanism of last resort. In addition, aid agencies estimate that a large percentage of the population have moved to urban areas in search of limited food available commercially in some urban areas like Jijiga.

¶9. Although the GOE's federal Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Agency (DPPA) recently confirmed that 42 trucks are currently en route within the region, no food aid has actually been distributed in the Ogaden areas of the Somali Region since December 2006. [NOTE: There have been recent food distributions to the non-Ogadeni areas of the Somali Region. END NOTE.] Part of a one-month ration (1,900 MT out of 4,000 MT) is currently en route to the Ogaden for the 296,980 beneficiaries identified during the November 2006 assessment. As of August 9, no food aid from the 42 trucks had reached actual distribution points, primarily due to repeated delays at military checkpoints. The recent household economy assessment, which undertook field work in limited areas of two of the five zones, indicates that 100 percent of the population is severely affected with no access to food. The 1,900 MT underway represents 6 percent of the total needs in the affected areas for one month, should the commercial restrictions remain.

¶10. In recent meetings, WFP has stressed that significant tonnage is required for these areas; even if the small amount of food aid currently en route reaches beneficiary populations, this represents only a "drop in the bucket" and is a very temporary stopgap measure. WFP and DPPA estimate that 30,000 MT per month of commodities in the restricted zones is required to fully support food needs should the commercial restrictions continue. [COMMENT: It is not clear if the magnitude of food required in such a

circumstance would be immediately available in-country, nor is it likely that operations of this nature can reach the beneficiaries in a timely manner, given current delay tactics in the movement of the food. The only solution that could immediately mitigate the slide into pre-famine or famine conditions will be the immediate easing of commercial restrictions in all areas of the region. END COMMENT.]

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EXTREMELY LIMITED HUMANITARIAN ACCESS  
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¶11. Despite recent GOE press statements urging agencies to work in the Somali Region with unlimited access, the reality on the ground is much different. Very few NGOs are operating in the military zones, because almost all movements are restricted due to security reasons. Access for UN agencies is virtually non-existent in military areas. WFP noted that although monitoring food aid deliveries is critical, it is currently impossible due to the underlying security conditions. Although WFP has invited local NGOs to monitor on their behalf, no one has accepted, due to underlying fears of security implications, though agencies are willing to share the limited information they possess.

¶12. Following the July 29 tragedy in which three staff from the USAID-supported local NGO partner Ogaden Welfare Development Agency (OWDA) were killed from a landmine between Degehamedo and Degehabur towns, concerns for safe humanitarian access have increased. There are growing reports, albeit unconfirmed, that additional landmines are being planted on many of the main roads in the Ogaden areas, since the underlying assumption is that only the military are using the roads rather than the usual commercial traffic and, to a lesser extent, aid agencies.

¶13. Creating safe humanitarian operational space will become increasingly important should the conditions continue to deteriorate. NGOs and UN agencies are working to determine best entry or re-entry points into the Ogaden areas to provide health, nutrition and water interventions. Some Somali Region government ministries have urged aid agencies to conduct humanitarian operations, recognizing that the humanitarian needs will surpass local capacities should the commercial restrictions remain. Agencies are working on modalities to begin humanitarian interventions in locations as close to the non-accessible areas as possible, in the hopes that if/when more widespread access to the Ogaden areas is possible, agencies can be partially pre-positioned.

¶14. Donors, UN agencies, and NGOs continue to meet weekly to share information on the evolving situation. The U.S. Ambassador has also convened two meetings for donors and relevant agencies on the Somali region situation. USAID, in conjunction with other donors and UNOCHA, is advocating the formation of a Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Risk Management working group, which would be a formal forum in which donors and the UN can engage with each other and the government on humanitarian and disaster risk management issues. Currently, information-sharing is informal, and engagement with the government on disaster issues is on a bilateral basis, particularly for the Somali Region.

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DISASTER DECLARATION  
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¶15. In light of current and increased projected needs in Somali Region of Ethiopia, I hereby declare that a complex emergency situation exists. Ongoing commercial

restrictions, limited operational access due to internal security operations and population displacement has exacerbated the plight of the already vulnerable.

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Accordingly, activities which address urgent humanitarian needs should continue to be eligible for funding under USAID's International Disaster Assistance.

YAMAMOTO